

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ROME 09215 061150Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 9215

LIMDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE'S OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, VT
SUBJECT: VATICAN CHANGES: POPE PROMOTES A POSSIBLE SECESSOR

1. THE VATICAN ANNOUNCED JUNE 2 THAT MONS. GIOVANNI BENELLI, THE SUBSTITUTE SECRETARY OF STATE, WAS APPOINTED ARCHBISHOP OF FLORENCE AND WILL BE ELEVATED TO CARDINAL AT SPECIAL CONSISTORY JUNE 27.

2. THE APPOINTMENT HAS ENGENDERED MUCH SPECULATION REGARDING THE POPE'S MOTIVATION BECAUSE BENELLI IS THE POPE'S CLOSEST AND PRINCIPAL ADVISER. IN COURSE OF 10 YEARS AS SUBSTITUTE SECRETARY OF STATE (I.E. VICE PREMIER), BENELLI EARNED REPUTATION AS SUPERB ADMINISTRATOR OF VATICAN AFFAIRS. IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE REPORTING OFFICER AND THAT OF MANY MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ATTACHED TO THE VATICAN, BENELLI HAS BEEN THE ONLY PAPAL ADVISER WHO COULD CUT ACROSS RAPIDLY THROUGH THE BUREAUCRATIC TANGLE OF THE ROMAN CURIA. HIS DECISIONS ARE CRISP AND AUTHORITATIVE. HE HAS BEEN THE WORKHORSE OF THE VATICAN AND THROUGH EXTRA-ORDINARY INTELLIGENCE AND ENERGY HE IS PROBABLY THE ONLY VATICAN OFFICIAL TO POSSESS INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 ROME 09215 061150Z

OF THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF THE VATICAN'S WORLD-WIDE INTERESTS, RESOURCES, ACTIVITIES AND PROBLEMS.

3. UPON INITIAL ANALYSIS IT APPEARS THAT POPE PAUL WAS MOTIVATED BY THE FOLLOWING FACTORS IN LETTING SUCH A CLOSE COLLABORATOR DEPART FROM THE VATICAN:

-- THE POPE, WHO WILL BE 80 YEARS OLD IN SEPTEMBER, BY TRANSFERRING BENELLI TO ONE OF THE KEY CATHOLIC SEES, WANTED TO INDICATE HIS CHOICE OF A SUCCESSOR. (ALTHOUGH THE CONCLAVE WHICH ELECTS POPE DOES NOT HAVE A FIXED RULE ON THE POINT, ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE IN RUNNING A LARGE DIOCESE IS TRADITIONALLY CONSIDERED AN ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT.)

-- THE POPE, A REALIST WHO HAS SPENT MANY YEARS IN THE EXACT POSITION CURRENTLY HELD BY BENELLI, REALIZES THAT BENELLI, DECISIONS AND DECISION-MAKING STYLE HAVE CREATED RESENTMENTS AMONG HIGH RANKING PRELATES. BY MAKING BENELLI A CARDINAL HE PROTECTS HIM AGAINST PERSONAL ANIMOSITIES IN THE FUTURE.

-- THE POPE'S ACTION STRENGTHENS THE ITALIAN CHURCH HIERARCHY. BENELLI TOOK A SPECIAL INTEREST IN GUIDING ITALIAN CHURCH AFFAIRS AND INDEED HE EXERCISED MUCH DIRECT INFLUENCE, PARTIALLY BECUASE THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (CEI) HAS BEEN LEADERLESS AND LOOKED TO THE VATICAN FOR GUIDANCE. THIS WAS DUE TO PROLONGED ILLNESS OF ITS PRESIDENT (CARDINAL POMA). ONE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS HAS BEEN TO MAKE CONSPICUOUS THE VATICAN ROLE IN ITALIAN POLITICS. THE POPE HAS BEEN CONCERNED WITH THIS BECAUSE IT GOES AGAINST THE POST VATICAN COUNCIL II OBJECTIVES OF DISENGAGING

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ROME 09215 061150Z

THE VATICAN FROM ITALIAN POLITICS. BENELLI'S PRESENCE AS A LEADING MEMBER OF THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY IS EXPECTED TO IMBUE THE CEI WITH INDEPENDENCE AND ENERGY AND AT THE SAME TIME ALSO LOWER THE VATICAN PROFILE.

4. COMMENT: POPE'S CHOICE OF A SUCCESSOR TO BENELLI--OR HIS POSSIBLE REARRANGEMENT OF THE DECISION-MAKING APPARATUS--WILL ALSO INDICATE THE GENERAL DIRECTION OF VATICAN POLICY. BENELLI WAS KNOWN AS AN INTELLIGENT CONSERVATIVE WHOSE WORKING PHILOSOPHY--REFORM IN ORDER TO CONSERVE--WAS REFLECTED IN THE OVERALL VATICAN POLICY DURING THE PAST TEN YEARS. HOWEVER, THE DEPARTURE OF THIS IMMENSELY POWERFUL VATICAN OFFICIAL IS NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE SUBSTANTIALLY THE DIRECTION OR SUBSTANCE OF VATICAN DIPLOMACY. FOREIGN MINISTER AGOSTINO CASAROLI REMAINS AT THE VATICAN AS THE POPE'S CLOSE COLLABORATOR AND WILL CONTINUE TO ORCHESTRATE VATICAN DIPLOMACY, INCLUDING THE VATICAN'S OSTPOLITIK WHICH SEEKS MODUS

VIVENDI WITH THE COMMUNIST REGIMES IN EASTERN EUROPE.GARDNER

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